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# THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND THE GREAT WAR

## ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

In discussing the historiography of the Great War and the Christian churches in Great Britain (for our purposes, England, Scotland and Wales), the essential point to be made is that the religious impact of the Great War on British society has been greatly misunderstood. Allied to a mutually reinforcing discourse on the futility and disillusionment of Britain's war experience, until quite recently the dominant narrative maintained that the war dealt the British churches an irrecoverable blow. Ultimately, the physical horrors and moral contradictions of this, the bloodiest foreign war in British history, resulted in a general loss of religious faith (or, given the contemporary boom in spiritualism, at least orthodox faith) which greatly accelerated the secularisation of British society — a process that was already well advanced as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the scientific and technological advances of the nineteenth century. Buoyed by the nuclear era pacifism of the Cold War, and favoured by the secularising *Zeitgeist* of the later decades of the twentieth century, this view held sway for generations, with church historians of the Great War (who were often clergy themselves) being keen to point a 'prophetic' and reproachful finger at the misguided and even reprehensible conduct of their co-religionists between 1914 and 1918. However, this interpretation of the religious effects of the Great War on British society is now being superseded. It is the purpose of this essay to show how it has been questioned and also to indicate how a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the religious impact of the Great War on British society can be achieved in the coming years.

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As our starting point, let us first consider the myth of the loss of faith consequent upon the experience of the Great War and its dominance in the historiography of the war. In 1965, half a century later, the renowned historian A. J. P. Taylor wrote in *English History 1914-1945*, part of the hugely influential *Oxford History of England*, that "the sight of priests and bishops blessing guns or tanks during the Great War was not a good advertisement for the gospel of the Prince of Peace", especially in an age whose intellectual climate and relative material

abundance had rendered society much “less concerned with pie in the sky”<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, this view was endorsed and elaborated by church historians. In 1975, Stephen Koss declared in *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* that:

“However much a commonplace, it is no exaggeration to say that war, when it came unexpectedly in August 1914, dealt a shattering blow to organised religion. The churches never recovered from the ordeal, either in terms of communicants or self-possession. Thereafter, men looked elsewhere, if anywhere, for their moral certainties<sup>2</sup>.”

Stating the matter almost as forcefully, Adrian Hastings concurred in his *History of English Christianity* that:

“Christianity already appeared to have lost the intellectual battle well before the First World War began. What the war did was to shatter its social and political role as well: to unveil the truth to high and low alike of ecclesiastical near-irrelevance. When it was over the churches had simply to start again, from a weaker position and with next to no new resources or inspiration<sup>3</sup>.”

A tenacious trope in the historiography of Great Britain and the Great War, as recently as 2008 Martin Pugh could assert with reference to falling church attendance in the inter-war years: “The churches never really recovered from the role they had played as agents of official propaganda during the Great War<sup>4</sup>.” So entrenched has this mythology of a popular reaction against the churches become that, in a recent study of global religion and the Great War, Philip Jenkins aptly remarked that the war to end war has been didactically transformed into “a war to end faith”<sup>5</sup>.

In the British context, one of the earliest academic proponents of this morally and emotionally satisfying thesis was the clergyman and religious sociologist Edward Ralph Wickham, whose seminal study of the city of Sheffield, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, appeared in 1957. According to Wickham, the Industrial Revolution had already served to create a gulf between organised religion and the urban working classes, but the industrialised slaughter of 1914-18 turned this gulf into an unbridgeable chasm. From

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<sup>1</sup> George CLARK (ed), *The Oxford History of England*, vol. XV, *English History (1914-1945)*, ed. Alan John Percivale TAYLOR, Oxford, pp. 168-9.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen KOSS, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, London-Sydney, 1975, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian HASTINGS, *A History of English Christianity (1920-1990)*, London/Philadelphia (Pa.), 1991, pp. 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Martin PUGH, “*We Danced all Night.*” *A Social History of Britain Between the Wars*, London, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Philip JENKINS, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*, [New York], 2014, p. 191.

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Wickham's perspective, the Great War had "devastating effects on the religious life of the nation", its impact on the churches being nothing less than "catastrophic". Not only did their wartime behaviour give "further occasion for contempt", but the war increased "scepticism" among "the more serious-minded" and caused a general reaction "against 'organised religion'" in society at large<sup>6</sup>. With the Great War neatly slotted into the master narrative of the secularisation of British society, and illuminated by the later research of Alan Gilbert, whose statistics demonstrated "the inevitable decline of religion in industrial society" and seemed to show that "all the Churches lost ground substantially during World War I"<sup>7</sup>, by the 1970s it seemed that the task of church historians was simply to expand upon where the churches had gone so disastrously wrong. And these were troubled years, and therefore auspicious times, in which to do so. The fiftieth anniversary of the Great War (1964-1968) had strengthened the dark legend of this terrible conflict in the British national psyche, especially against the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the ongoing Cold War, and the televised horrors of the Vietnam War. Moreover, and as Hugh McLeod has argued, the "long" 1960s (which he defined as 1958 to 1974) was a period of pivotal change in western Christianity, one so significant that it "may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation". In this turbulent period, churchgoing slumped in many western societies, together with the proportion of children being baptised and couples marrying in church. Perhaps more ominously, "those who rejected Christianity were increasingly ready to say so loudly and openly"<sup>8</sup>.

In demonstrating the perceived contribution of the Great War to the apparently self-evident, long-term failure of the British churches, scholars naturally turned first and foremost to the Church of England. As the established church of the most populous part of Great Britain, with its enduring links to the nation's social, political and military elite, and with the monarch as its Supreme Governor, the Church of England was increasingly regarded as the chief culprit in that massive ecclesiastical blunder that was the churches' support for the Great War. This had not previously been the case, however. In a review of its wartime conduct

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Ralph WICKHAM, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, London, 1957, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> Callum G. BROWN, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation (1800-2000)*, London-New York, 2001 (Christianity and Society in the Modern World), p. 28, and Robert CURRIE, Alan GILBERT and Lee HORSLEY, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, Oxford, 1977, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh MCLEOD, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Oxford-New York, 2007, p. 1.

undertaken in the early 1960s, Canon Roger Lloyd had contended that the Church of England had in fact emerged with considerable credit from the conflict, arguing that:

“The impression which any fair-minded student of the evidence will get is that during the First World War the Church was blessed with genuinely Christian and unusually wise episcopal leadership, and that hardly ever in history has Lambeth Palace played a more noble part than it did in those dreadful years<sup>9</sup>.”

Likewise, and in an Open University textbook entitled *War, Peace and Religion*, as late as 1973 Francis Clark extended a favourable judgement to the Church of England in general, maintaining that, in the era of both World Wars, “the Church of England showed its perennial ability to survive and to adapt itself to changed circumstances. However unfavourably critics might speak of it, the national Church showed its vitality in many ways during the period we are considering.” Significantly, Clark even saw the Church of England’s 1916 National Mission of Repentance and Hope as emblematic of this “vitality”, notwithstanding its failure to engender a general religious revival among the nation at large<sup>10</sup>. Finally, Clark did not except the Church of England from his judgement that “the clergy and members of the Churches were by no means the pious jingoists and ecclesiastical Colonel Blimps that some suppose”<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, by the late 1970s the tone had changed completely for, in the intervening years, a new generation of scholars such as Albert Marrin, Alan Wilkinson and Stuart Mews (in his widely read, if still unpublished, Cambridge doctoral thesis) had come forward to sift and to weigh the statements and positions of Anglican leaders and luminaries in order to present an aggregate picture of uncertainty and failure, a far cry from what Lloyd had perceived a decade earlier<sup>12</sup>.

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In his book *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (1974), Albert Marrin concluded that the war “had a chastening influence upon church and nation”, adding that “the realization in later years that they had been taken in by propaganda as well as

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<sup>9</sup> Roger LLOYD, *The Church of England (1900-1965)*, London, 1966, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> John FERGUSON and Francis CLARK, *War, Peace and Religion*, Milton Keynes, 1973, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> R. LLOYD, *The Church of England...*, pp. 219 and 238.

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by their own predispositions induced a sense of shame and disappointment<sup>13</sup>.” Although Marrin was taken to task by the eminent church historian Owen Chadwick for allowing himself “many adverse judgments against people or utterances”, and for simply assuming “that an authentic Christianity will be pacifist”<sup>14</sup>, only four years after the appearance of *The Last Crusade* Alan Wilkinson published a comparable study entitled *The Church of England and the First World War*. Though less trenchant than Marrin, Wilkinson nonetheless assured his readers that he had long “learnt to be critical of conventional patriotism”, and brushed aside Lloyd’s earlier view of the Church of England’s wartime record as “over sanguine”<sup>15</sup>. Strongly coloured by his literary and theological sources, Wilkinson’s work concurred that posterity had “the right and the duty to be critical” of the Church of England in the Great War, and pointedly claimed that its shortcomings were no less than those of the contemporary Church of England and its failure to take a firm stand against nuclear weapons<sup>16</sup>. Although Mews adopted a somewhat broader perspective in his thesis *Religion and English Society in the First World War*, which covered the English Free Churches as well as the Church of England, his conclusions were fully in tune with those of Marrin and Wilkinson, duly concluding that “the First World War was a revelation of the extent to which the churches had lost their hold on society and it accelerated the process”<sup>17</sup>. In subsequent years, this new scholarly consensus was complemented and reinforced by David M. Thompson’s research into the origins of the Church of England’s 1916 National Mission of Repentance and Hope, whose very conception he found to be vague and confused<sup>18</sup>, and by Arlie J. Hoover’s comparative study of the thunderous wartime preaching of British and German churchmen (1989)<sup>19</sup>. Arguably, this current of pessimism found its last expression in a 2002 article by

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<sup>13</sup> Albert MARRIN, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War*, Durham (N.C.), 1974, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Owen CHADWICK, “*The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War*, by Albert Marrin”, in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 80 (1975), p. 648.

<sup>15</sup> Alan WILKINSON, *The Church of England and the First World War*, London, 1978, pp. xi and 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart P. MEWS, *Religion and English Society in the First World War*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1973, p. 339.

<sup>18</sup> David M. THOMPSON, “War, the Nation, and the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, 1915-16”, in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 20 (1983) [William J. SHEILS (ed.), “The Church and War”], pp. 337-50.

<sup>19</sup> Arlie J. HOOVER, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism*, New York/London, 1989.

Shannon Ty Bontrager who, carelessly branding the Church of England “the state church of an imperial nation”, went on to conclude from a study of just two church periodicals that it ultimately failed in its febrile wartime bid “to gain status and power after a long period of losing them”<sup>20</sup>.

However, there were other, more unfortunate corollaries of this heavy scholarly reliance on published sources and on the activities and pronouncements of the Church of England’s leading figures. Firstly, and in focusing exclusively on the opinions and reactions of the Church’s clerical and lay elite, its exponents inevitably marginalised popular religious attitudes and behaviour. Albert Marrin, for example, freely conceded that he had “had to rely heavily on printed sources”, and especially on published sermons and the national church press. Significantly, he evinced marked impatience with manuscript sources — which he strangely maintained were “unfortunately less full and less available than in other areas of English history” — and was completely dismissive of diocesan and parish publications, which to him appeared “dull and packed with local small talk”<sup>21</sup>. Although Alan Wilkinson’s *The Church of England and the First World War* (1978) drew still more heavily on published sources, he did not entirely eschew the humble parish magazine. Nevertheless, he addressed the experience of only a single “small parish”, that of Alsager in Cheshire, in the space of a book of more than 300 pages<sup>22</sup>. Secondly, such heavy reliance on published sources (church periodicals, printed sermons, and more “heavyweight” religious commentary) could prove deceptive, as historians were liable to miss the deeper stories behind some critical texts. In his extensive survey of Anglican chaplains, for example, Alan Wilkinson made no reference to the papers of the senior Anglican chaplain on the Western Front, Bishop Llewellyn Henry Gwynne (largely concentrated in the archives of the Church Missionary Society); to Gwynne’s correspondence with Archbishop Randall Davidson (located in the Davidson papers at Lambeth Palace Library); or to the minutes of thirteen major conferences of Anglican chaplains held on the Western Front between April 1916 and January 1918 (held in the archives of the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department). Likewise, the highly critical findings of *The Army and Religion* report of 1919, the work of a self-selecting body of progressive Protestant churchmen, were largely taken at face value by Clark, Marrin and Wilkinson rather than understood as a selective compilation of evidence in favour of a particular agenda for

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<sup>20</sup> Shannon TY BONTRAGER, “The Imagined Crusade: The Church of England and the Mythology of Nationalism and Christianity during the Great War”, in *Church History*, vol. 71 (2002), pp. 774-98, at p. 774.

<sup>21</sup> A. MARRIN, *The Last Crusade*..., p. ix.

<sup>22</sup> A. WILKINSON, *The Church of England*..., pp. 58-62, 191-92 and 297.

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post-war church reform, as Mews rightly inferred from his much deeper study of manuscript sources<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, some of these works rehearsed the now notorious story of the Bishop of London, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, urging his listeners to slaughter Germans in an Advent sermon of 1915, with none conceding that an earlier exchange in the journal *Theology* had in fact called the whole episode into question. Significantly, recent research into the transmission of this tale has cogently argued that the controversial content of this sermon was the later invention of a secularist propagandist, George Bedborough, who sought to ride the pacifist tide of the mid-1930s by publishing a doctored compilation of clerical declarations on the Great War under the incriminating title *Arms and the Clergy*<sup>24</sup>.

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Significantly, studies of other Christian traditions have tended to follow the same trajectory. While concentrating on specific denominations, or denominational families, they have generally reflected the emphasis on church leadership that has prevailed in the historiography of the Church of England, while likewise pointing towards the deleterious effect of war on organised religion. As Edwardian England's second largest church constituency, interest has naturally focused on the English Free Churches, a cluster of Protestant churches that had since 1662 defined itself against the state and the established Church of England. Furthermore, these 'Nonconformist' churches included England's historic and most conspicuous bastion of Christian pacifism in the form of the Society of Friends. In the context of the 1970s narrative, and of their decline throughout most of the decades that followed the Great War, the Free Churches' general and close alignment with the national war effort between 1914 and 1918 has been deemed especially reprehensible and predictably catastrophic. According to Mews's scathing perspective on one significant "milestone" in the history of English Nonconformity:

"On 16 November, King George V and Queen Mary attended a Free Church thanksgiving service to mark the end of the war [...]. Free Churchmen could only comfort themselves with the crumbs of

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<sup>23</sup> J. FERGUSON and F. CLARK, *War, Peace and Religion...*, p. 95; A. MARRIN, *The Last Crusade...*, pp. 203-5; A. WILKINSON, *The Church of England...*, pp. 160-65, and S. P. MEWS, *Religion and English Society...*, p. 174.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart BELL, "Malign or Maligned? Arthur Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London, in the First World War", in *Journal for the History of Modern Theology*, vol. 20 (2013), pp. 117-33, at pp. 127-29.



royal patronage which marked their acceptance or toleration by an establishment which no longer had reason to fear them<sup>25</sup>.”

Keith W. Clements, in an article on the response of English Baptists to the outbreak of war, was emphatic about the moral costs of the conflict to Nonconformity in general:

“Idealism seemed faced with a sad choice: on the one hand, to make ineffectual protest; on the other, to bow to the grim realities of power and conflict. Either way, it spelled the end of that Nonconformist idealism which believed that politics in this world could and should be directed by clear moral choices<sup>26</sup>.”

In 1986, and once again through a composite lens of literature, theology, and history, Alan Wilkinson surveyed the impact of both World Wars on English Christianity in *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945*. Here, Wilkinson endorsed the verdict that Nonconformity’s support for the Great War had been a fruitless and compromising experience, concluding that “the close identification of Nonconformity with the war effort was contrary to some of its deepest instincts [...]. This identification therefore led to a destructive confusion in its own mind and that of others as to what it really stood for now<sup>27</sup>.” Nearly twenty years later, Alan Ruston summarised the enduring scholarly consensus as to the impact of the Great War on the English Free Churches, a conflict that had basically seen them sell their souls to the state:

“The Great, or First World War, saw the Nonconformist churches become more a part of the establishment than they had ever been before, particularly in attitude. They became an integral element within the political machine in almost the same terms as the established church [of England]. But flying into the sun in this way burnt their wings and like Icarus they fell to the sea. They did not drown like Icarus but the weakness engendered by the war remained with them for the rest of the century<sup>28</sup>.”

Although studies of Scottish Presbyterianism (both established, and non-established) and Scottish and Welsh Nonconformity have ranged more widely, in aggregate they have

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<sup>25</sup> S. P. MEWS, *Religion and English Society*..., p. 334.

<sup>26</sup> Keith W CLEMENTS, “Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War”, in *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 26 (1975), pp. 74-92, at p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> A. WILKINSON, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches (1900-1945)*, London, 1986, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Alan RUSTON, “Protestant Nonconformist Attitudes towards the First World War”, in Alan P. F. SELL and Anthony R. CROSS (eds), *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century*, Carlisle, 2003, p. 240.

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reflected the dominant emphasis on leading personalities and institutional affairs<sup>29</sup>. And they have also largely echoed the judgements that were so common elsewhere. In one study of Scottish Baptists and the Great War, which was undertaken “against the background of the Falklands conflict” (which, according to its author, “inevitably” affected the direction it took) S. D. Hendry noted with regret “just how quickly war develops and how ‘public opinion’, both Christian and secular, can move easily and quickly from relative pacifism to bellicosity”<sup>30</sup>. Disappointingly to Hendry, and as revealed by their perspectives on conscientious objectors during the Great War, “to Scottish Baptists, at least, it would appear there was little to object to”<sup>31</sup>. Nearly a decade later, and in his seminal study of the established Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, which were heading towards reunification at the time of the Great War, Stewart J. Brown also lamented the revelations and effects of the conflict, asserting that “the war-time expressions of Presbyterian ministers and academics, concerning the elevating effects of the war as religious crusade or the promise of a new, more just social order, would haunt the Church with a sense of loss and shame during the troubled years that followed”<sup>32</sup>. Likewise, and surveying the impact of war on predominantly Nonconformist Wales, D. Densil Morgan argued that it was, at best, “ambiguous”. Largely casting aside their pre-war pacifist leanings, Welsh Nonconformists had been disappointed in their expectations of a religious revival, and even before the war had ended it seemed apparent that “post-war Wales would be a new, strange Wales, where the old values would be put aside and Christianity be increasingly regarded as an anachronism”<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> C. G. BROWN, “Piety, Gender and War in Scotland in the 1910s”, in Catriona M. M. MACDONALD and Elaine W. MCFARLAND (eds), *Scotland and the Great War*, East Linton, 1999; Samuel D. HENDRY, “Scottish Baptists and the First World War”, in *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 31 (1985), pp. 52-65; James Lachlan MACLEOD, “‘The Mighty Hand of God.’ The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Great War”, in *Bridges*, vol. 12 (2007), pp. 19-41; ID., “‘Its own Little Share of Service to the National Cause.’ The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland’s Chaplains in the First World War”, in *Northern Scotland*, vol. 21 (2001), pp. 79-97; Peter MATHESON, “Scottish War Sermons”, in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, vol. 17 (1972), pp. 203-13, and D. Densil MORGAN, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales (1914-2000)*, Cardiff, 1999, pp. 41-77.

<sup>30</sup> S. D. HENDRY, “Scottish Baptists and the First World War” ..., p. 52.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart J. BROWN, “‘A Solemn Purification by Fire.’ Responses to the Great War in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches (1914-19)”, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 45 (1994), pp. 82-104, at p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> D. D. MORGAN, *The Span of the Cross*..., p. 76.

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Nevertheless, there were two salient problems with this broad scholarly consensus. Firstly, the experience of Roman Catholicism in Great Britain plainly defied the dominant trope of calamitous misjudgement and consequent decline. In Marrin's fulsome opinion, the Roman Catholic Church was "universally recognized as doing splendid work" during the war itself<sup>34</sup>, and Mews has likewise agreed that the First World War was a "good" war for British Catholicism<sup>35</sup>. And yet the Catholic hierarchies of England and Scotland — and especially England — were no less zealous in their support for the war than were their equivalents in the Protestant churches, and this quite irrespective of the neutrality of Pope Benedict XV<sup>36</sup>. As Keith Robbins has pointed out, the singular demographics of English, Scottish and Welsh Catholicism — and especially the fact that "the Roman Catholic Church included more non-native born in its ranks than any other church" — served to intensify strong, ultra-patriotic instincts among Catholics that were born of centuries of marginalisation and a keen desire to become part of the national mainstream<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, the bellicose sentiments often attributed (or misattributed) to the Anglican bishop of London in his notorious Advent sermon of 1915 were actually expressed by a leading Catholic preacher, Fr. Bernard Vaughan, in a speech in London's Mansion House in January 1916, an incident that sparked a flurry of indignant protests at the time<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, and despite its war record, the Catholic Church increased its constituency in the 1920s and '30s due to natural growth, conversions, and immigration from Ireland, thus blunting scholarly attempts to indict its wartime leadership along the lines of their Protestant counterparts and illustrating that far more was at work in influencing the fortunes of the churches in the inter-war period than reactions and recriminations over the war itself.

Secondly, a new chronology of the secularisation (or 'dechristianisation') of British society has helped to throw established perspectives into question. Inspired by a greater use of

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<sup>34</sup> A. MARRIN, *The Last Crusade*..., p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> S. MEWS, "Religious Life between the Wars, 1920-1940" ; in Sheridan GILLEY and W. J. SHEILS (eds), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, Oxford-Cambridge (Mass.), 1994, p. 452.

<sup>36</sup> Michael SNAPE, "British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War", in *Recusant History*, vol. 26 (2002), pp. 314-58.

<sup>37</sup> Keith ROBBINS, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church (1900-2000)*, Oxford, 2008 (Oxford History of the Christian Church), p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> Youssef TAOUK, *The Roman Catholic Church in Britain during the First World War: A Study in Political Leadership*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2003, pp. 205-7.

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qualitative evidence, and especially of oral history, and predicated on the view that “what made Britain Christian was not levels of churchgoing but the way in which Christianity infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, in forming their own identities”<sup>39</sup>, a new chronology of secularisation pioneered by Callum Brown posits that the secularisation of British society was not a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation (“the long, inevitable religious decline of the conventional secularisation story”) but “a remarkably sudden and culturally violent event” that was ushered in by the cultural upheavals of the “long” 1960s<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, and with reference to the Great War, Brown has argued that “much of what British churchmen at the time characterised as loss of faith was actually loss of Edwardian reverence for social authority, for obedience to the clergy. The class system was changing, but popular Christian faith still retained resilience<sup>41</sup>.” On the basis of his own, largely qualitative, research, Keith Robbins has also concluded that the war caused no significant changes to the religious landscape of Great Britain, and certainly did not precipitate any seismic shifts in a negative direction. According to Robbins, “the war had brought neither a general revival of religion nor a mass alienation from it”<sup>42</sup>. More recently, the interrogation of masses of statistical data by Clive Field has also confirmed the survival of a fairly robust and resilient religious culture in Great Britain throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Although, unlike Brown, subscribing to a gradualist rather than revolutionary model of religious change, Field has shown that during and after the Great War the British churches were more adversely affected by the simple disruption of peacetime norms and routines than they were by any haemorrhaging of religious faith per se<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, Field has concluded that the decline in church membership and public religious practice in the inter-war years was much more a function of long-term social change — “notably enhanced leisure and transport opportunities on Sundays” — than it was of “any great ‘crisis of faith’” induced by the war itself<sup>44</sup>. Significantly, and writing in 2011,

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<sup>39</sup> C. G. BROWN, *The Death of Christian Britain...*, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76 and 188.

<sup>41</sup> ID., *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Harlow, 2006 (Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain), p. 112.

<sup>42</sup> K. ROBBINS, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales...*, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup> Clive D. FIELD, “Keeping the Spiritual Home Fires Burning: Religious Belonging in Britain during the First World War”, in *War and Society*, vol. 33 (2014), pp. 244-68.

<sup>44</sup> ID., “Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain (1918-1939)”, in *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 93 (2013), pp. 57-93, at pp. 91-93.

Simon Green had already expressed his well-founded scepticism over the religious impact of the Great War as so often propounded by “engaged professionals and detached historians alike”, emphasising that:

“Surviving organisational statistics point to no sharp break in the pattern of associational membership, worshipful attendance, financial contributions or even popular adherence to the sanctity of the rites of passage, after 1918. [...] Similarly, there was no sign, at least no visible sign, to suggest that all of a sudden ‘the people’ ceased to believe in God, the devil, the after-life and the ultimate triumph of good over evil as a result of all the carnage that ensued, between 1914 and 1918. Some, hyper-sophisticated minds no doubt did have their confidence in a transcendental order of justice shattered by the events of the Great War. But most, it would seem, did not<sup>45</sup>.”

These key developments in the study and understanding of secularisation in Great Britain during the twentieth century have naturally afforded ample scope for a radical reappraisal of the role and fortunes of the British churches in the Great War. Before the paradigm shift in the chronology of secularisation championed by Brown, and constrained by a historiography that came close to resembling a collection of morality tales for the nuclear era, it was hard for historians to return anything other than a negative verdict on the role and fortunes of religion in the British army, an institution that has dominated British perceptions of the Great War and whose study since the 1980s (especially in the field of its command and campaigns) has lent considerable momentum to revisionist appraisals of the whole war experience. With its soldiers standing as a cross-section of adult male society in Great Britain, and with army chaplains effectively cast as the supreme embodiments of their churches’ support for the war, their general failure has been taken for granted, and as tragically symptomatic of their sending churches’ misguided and counter-productive approach to the conflict. Consequently, and as late as 1996, a doctoral thesis which focused on Anglican army chaplains argued that “the Army clearly did not know what to make of uniformed chaplains on active service”, that the chaplain’s ministry was dogged by distinctions of military rank and social class, that the churches at home were “completely out of touch with the needs of the chaplains”, and that even the most capable of chaplains were faced with the insuperable problem of “the overwhelming indifference of the troops to organized religion”<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Simon J. D. GREEN, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change (c.1920-1960)*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 61-62.

<sup>46</sup> Alison M. BROWN, *Army Chaplains in the First World War*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1996, pp. 222-35.

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However, since the late 1990s a series of studies on religion and the British army — and on chaplaincy in particular — have thrown into question such conclusions and the consensus that underpinned them. Significantly, these studies have tended to be much more reliant on manuscript sources than their predecessors, with the hitherto neglected papers of Bishop Gwynne, for instance, figuring as a key source<sup>47</sup>. Despite some resistance, notably to the attempt to view Roman Catholic chaplaincy in a more objective and contextual light<sup>48</sup>, together these studies have undermined dominant and even driving assumptions as to soldiers' religious indifference, the incompetence of their Anglican chaplains in particular, and of a widespread, war-induced crisis of faith. Led by the work of Richard Schweitzer, who in 1998 perceived a “rich variety of religious experiences encountered by British soldiers on the Western Front”<sup>49</sup>, and who developed a “spectrum model” in order to capture the religious responses and experiences of contemporary British soldiers<sup>50</sup>, these studies have in aggregate comprehensively reappraised the religious impact of the Great War and the ministry of the clergy in uniform. In addition to important contributions by Schweitzer and other historians such as Peter Howson, Katherine Finlay, Edward Madigan and Linda Parker<sup>51</sup>, Michael

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<sup>47</sup> M. SNAPE, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars*, Abingdon-New York, 2005 (Christianity and Society in the Modern World); ID., *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department (1796-1953): Clergy under Fire*, Woodbridge, 2008 (Studies in Modern British Religious History, 18); EDWARD MADIGAN, “Hidden Courage: Post-War Literature and Anglican Army Chaplains on the Western Front (1914-1918)”, in Heather JONES, Jennifer O'BRIEN and Christoph SCHMIDT-SUPPRIAN (eds), *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies*, Leiden-Boston, 2008 (History of Warfare, 49), pp. 63-94, and PETER HOWSON, *Muddling Through: The Organisation of British Army Chaplaincy in World War One*, Solihull, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> OLIVER RAFFERTY, “Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War”, in *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 39 (2011), pp. 33-62.

<sup>49</sup> RICHARD SCHWEITZER, “The Cross and the Trenches: religious faith and doubt among some British soldiers on the Western Front”, in *War and Society*, vol. 16 (1998), pp. 33-57, at p. 55.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36, and ID., *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers*, Westport (Conn.)-London, 2003 (Contributions in Military Studies, 225), pp. 17-61.

<sup>51</sup> KATHERINE FINLAY, “Angels in the Trenches: British Soldiers and Miracles in the First World War” in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 41 (2005) [Kate COOPER and Jeremy GREGORY (eds), “Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church”,], pp. 443-452; PETER HOWSON, “Deaths among Army Chaplains (1914–1920)”, in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 83 (2005), pp. 63-77; M. SNAPE, “Anglican Army Chaplains in the First World War: Goodbye to *Goodbye to All That*”, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 62 (2011), p. 318-345; E. MADIGAN, “Hidden Courage...”; ID., *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War*, Basingstoke, 2011; M. SNAPE and E. MADIGAN (eds), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War*, Farnham-

Snape's *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (2005) aligned this development with Brown's new chronology of secularisation, arguing that "the experience of the two World Wars cannot be described as a secularising influence in relation to British public life"<sup>52</sup>, and that war could in fact sustain and even strengthen organised religion and personal faith.

Significantly, this new body of research has been accompanied by a growing willingness to move beyond the boundaries of denomination (or denominational families) in gauging the religious impact of the war. Most significantly, this has been instanced by the rediscovery — long overdue — of the wartime activities and influence of the interdenominational Young Men's Christian Association, the largest civilian provider for the spiritual, intellectual and physical welfare of the British soldier of 1914-1918. With the rich and extensive archives of the YMCA offering great potential for further studies, initial research by Jeff Reznick (2004) and Michael Snape (2009) has already helped to reconceptualise religious agency in the British army of this period<sup>53</sup>, thus helping to overturn the denominational and clergy-centred paradigms that have partly obscured the wider, underlying dynamics of British religious life in the era of the Great War. More recently, and beyond the intersection of the military and civilian realms represented by the wartime work of the YMCA, a fuller picture of religion on Great Britain's home front has also begun to emerge, one that has so far illustrated the extent of religious activity and the resilience of wartime faith in British society. Early examples are represented by James Hagerty's study of the Roman Catholic diocese of Leeds (1996)<sup>54</sup>; by Callum Brown's consideration of "piety, gender and war in Scotland in the 1910s" (1999)<sup>55</sup>; and by Michael Snape and Stephen Parker's "Keeping Faith and Coping: Belief, Popular

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Burlington (Vt.), 2013 (Ashgate Studies in First World War History), and Linda PARKER, *Shellshocked Prophets: Former Anglican Army Chaplains in Inter-War Britain*, Solihull, 2015 (Wolverhampton Military Studies, 6).

<sup>52</sup> M. SNAPE, *God and the British Soldier...*, p. 243.

<sup>53</sup> Jeffrey S. REZNICK, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War*, Manchester-New York, 2004, pp. 17-41, and M. SNAPE (ed.), *The Back Parts of War: The YMCA Memoirs and Letters of Barclay Baron (1915-1919)*, Woodbridge, 2009 (Church of England Record Society, 16), pp. 17-98.

<sup>54</sup> James M. HAGERTY, "The Diocese of Leeds during the First World War", in *Northern Catholic History*, vol. 36 (1996), pp. 36-48.

<sup>55</sup> C. G. BROWN, "Piety, Gender and War..."

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Religiosity and the British People in Two World Wars” (2001)<sup>56</sup>. In their pioneering comparative study of religious life in Paris, Berlin and London during the Great War (2007), Adrian Gregory and Annette Becker also emphasised the comparative vigour, stability and inclusivity of religion in the British capital, even among the poorest of its working classes, a situation that stood in sharp contrast to the fractured and even polarised religious worlds of contemporary Paris and Berlin<sup>57</sup>. The historiography of religion in modern Britain — and especially its pivotal eras, notably the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution — has been greatly enriched and heavily moulded by thorough and comparable case studies of specific regions and localities, studies that have served to transform historians’ understanding of popular religious life and the dynamics of religious change in a country that still retains a highly regionalised religious character<sup>58</sup>. If Sarah Williams’s ground breaking study of Southwark from 1880 to 1939 (1999) did much to illuminate Gregory and Becker’s work on wartime London<sup>59</sup>, comparable studies of religion in the English provinces during the Great War are now beginning to emerge, with two studies of the East Midlands being published in 2014<sup>60</sup>, and another, of the garrison town of Colchester, appearing in 2015<sup>61</sup>.

While the jigsaw of local religious life on the home front has yet to be prepared and assembled in anything like its entirety, the obvious and abiding importance of religion at a national level, and especially in terms of religion and national identity, has also been recognised and underlined in recent years. Adrian Gregory’s re-examination of the Church of England’s 1916 National Mission of Repentance and Hope (2008), which he deemed

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<sup>56</sup> M. F. SNAPE and Stephen G. PARKER, “Keeping Faith and Coping: Belief, Popular Religiosity and the British People in Two World Wars”, in Dr Peter LIDDLE, Dr John BOURNE and Dr Ian WHITEHEAD (eds), *The Great World War 1914-45*, vol. II, *The Peoples’ Experience*, Londres, 2001, pp. 398-420.

<sup>57</sup> Adrian GREGORY and Annette BECKER, “Religious Sites and Practices”, in Jay WINTER and Jean-Louis ROBERT (eds), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919*, vol. II, *A Cultural History*, Cambridge, 2007 (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, 25), pp. 383-427.

<sup>58</sup> Emma WHITE, “Religion in England and Wales 2001”, online article (last release 11 December 2012): <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html> [accessed 8 March 2016].

<sup>59</sup> Sarah C. WILLIAMS, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark (c.1880-1939)*, Oxford, 1999 (Oxford Historical Monographs).

<sup>60</sup> Stuart BELL, “‘Soldiers of Christ arise.’ Religious Nationalism in the East Midlands during World War I”, in *Midland History*, vol. 39 (2014), pp. 219-35, and Michael AUSTIN, “*Like a Swift Hurricane.*” *People, Clergy and Class in a Midlands Diocese (1914-1919)*, Chesterfield, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> R. BEAKEN, *The Church of England and the Home Front 1914-1918: Civilians, Soldiers and Religion in Wartime Colchester*, Woodbridge, 2015.



comparable to the battle of the Somme in terms of “enormous effort, negligible results”, was represented as a “failure” not because it was aimed at a religiously alienated or indifferent society but because leading lights in the Church of England fundamentally misunderstood “what people actually wanted from their Church”<sup>62</sup>. In contrast, Philip Williamson’s study of national days of prayer from 1899 to 1957 (2013), occasions that were organised by national church leaders and supported by the monarch, has illustrated just how successful these comparatively straightforward occasions were, and how in consequence “during the wars of the first half of the twentieth century, governments became more, not less, favourable towards special occasions of national worship”<sup>63</sup>. Inevitably, this fuller understanding of the patriotic and conservative temper of religious life on the home front helps to illuminate and explain the currency and purchase of themes such as sacrifice and martyrdom during the war years, themes that have already been explored by Gavin White, Patrick Porter, and Alexander Watson<sup>64</sup>, and sheds further contextual light on the emerging culture of remembrance, a field in which the unduly secular perspectives and judgments of cultural historians have usually held sway. In a similar vein, recognition of the nuanced but unambiguously Christian nature of popular religious belief helps to make greater sense of the spiritualist surge of the war years — a phenomenon that was not so much a symptom of the impotence of the churches (as Alan Wilkinson and David Cannadine have alleged) as emblematic of the innate diversity and dynamism of British Christianity<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> A. GREGORY, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 171.

<sup>63</sup> Philip WILLIAMSON, “National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain (1899-1957)”, in *English Historical Review*, vol. 128 (2013), pp. 323-66, at p. 345.

<sup>64</sup> Gavin WHITE, “The Martyr Cult of the First World War”, in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 30 (1993) [D. WOOD (ed.), “Martyrs and Martyrologies”], pp. 383-88; Patrick PORTER, “Beyond Comfort: German and English Military Chaplains and the Memory of the Great War (1919-1929)”, in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 29 (2005), pp. 258-89, and Alexander WATSON and P. PORTER, “Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of Sacrifice in the First World War”, in *Historical Research*, vol. 83 (2010), pp. 146-64.

<sup>65</sup> J. M. WINTER, “Spiritualism and the First World War”, in Richard W. DAVIS and Richard J. HELMSTADTER (eds), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honor of R. K. Webb*, London-New York, 1992; A. WILKINSON, *The Church of England...*, p. 196; David CANNADINE, “War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain”, in Joachim WHALEY (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, London, 1981 (The Social History of Human Experience, 3); A. WILKINSON, “Changing English Attitudes to Death in the Two World Wars”, in Peter C. JUPP and Glennys HOWARTH (eds), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, Basingstoke-London, 1997; J. L. MACLEOD, “‘Greater Love Hath No Man Than This.’ Scotland’s Conflicting Religious Responses to Death in the Great

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In the light of what could be described as a watershed in the historiography of the British churches and the Great War, revisionist historians have become increasingly critical of the perspectives and methodologies of earlier historians, and especially those who, in the 1970s, scrutinised the Church of England. For example, Adrian Gregory has written of *The Church of England and the First World War* that:

“In English-language historiography an important landmark was the publication of Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978), which made substantial use of Anglican archives. While it undoubtedly contributed to the serious investigation of the subject, it was also predicated on an assumption of failure: the basic argument is that the church failed to oppose the war and this failure undermined the authority of established Christianity with the population at large. While this view might be theologically defensible, there are serious historical problems with it<sup>66</sup>.”

Likewise, Stuart Bell’s essay on “The Church and the First World War”, written for a collected volume on the Church of England and armed conflict in the twentieth century, insisted that:

“The inescapable conclusion is that a war which was viewed by the overwhelming majority of English Anglicans as being morally and ethically justified did not raise for more than a small minority questions of ethics or theology. The leaders of the Church of England had little influence over the way the war was waged and the war itself had relatively little impact on the faith of the Church<sup>67</sup>.”

However, and despite evidence of a recent but decisive shift in our understanding of the importance of religion in British society in the era of the Great War, much work remains to be done, and historians have to develop their work in new directions — especially thematically, comparatively, and chronologically. As already noted, denominational studies of the religious

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War”, in *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 81 (2002), pp. 70-96; M. SNAPE, “Civilians, Soldiers and Perceptions of the Afterlife in Britain during the First World War”, in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 45 (2009) [Peter CLARKE and Tony CLAYDON (eds), “The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul”], pp. 371-403, and Georgina A. BYRNE, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England (1850-1939)*, Woodbridge, 2010 (Studies in Modern British Religious History, 25).

<sup>66</sup> A. GREGORY, “Beliefs and Religion”, in J. WINTER (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. III, *Civil Society*, Cambridge-New York, 2014, p. 678.

<sup>67</sup> S. BELL, “The Church and the First World War”, in S. G. PARKER and Tom LAWSON (eds), *God and War: The Church of England and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Farnham-Burlington (Vt.), 2012, p. 59.

history of the war have tended to obscure the importance of common factors and key binding agents among British Protestants in particular, with the King James Bible, the overseas missionary enterprise, and inter-denominational organisations such as the YMCA and the Sunday School Union being ignored for far too long. Still, even here there are signs of progress. The centenary of the outbreak of the Great War saw the Bible Society commission a preliminary study of the use of the Bible in Great Britain during the Great War<sup>68</sup>, and at least one postgraduate dissertation revealed the abiding and immediate importance of the Sunday School movement for the men who fought the war<sup>69</sup>. Furthermore, and although the earlier historiography of religion and the Great War (much of which was the work of liberal Protestants) tended to relegate evangelicalism and revivalism to the margins, recent studies have focused on the reaction of early British Pentecostals to the Great War and on the continuing strength of Britain's popular revivalist tradition — even in the ranks of the British army<sup>70</sup>. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done in this area, and especially on the continuing vigour of prophetic and apocalyptic tendencies in sections of British Protestantism, tendencies that gave rise to a stream of wartime pamphlets and booklets in reaction to the alignments and events of the war.

Clearly, it is also important to examine the British experience in its wider international context, and to identify the most illuminating international comparators. In the past decade, and in addition to Gregory and Becker's comparative study of London, Paris and Berlin, several studies have appeared on the war's religious impact on Europe and the wider world, on Christianity and on other religions<sup>71</sup>. However, and given the religious configuration of other European societies such as France, Germany and Italy, the impact of the Great War on British religion is arguably best understood in comparison with other, largely Protestant,

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<sup>68</sup> M. SNAPE, "The Bible, the British and the First World War", in *The Bible in Transmission*, Summer 2014, pp. 17-20.

<sup>69</sup> Catriona MCCARTNEY, *British Sunday Schools and the First World War*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Birmingham, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Darin D. LENZ, "'Visions on the Battlefields.' Alexander A. Boddy, Early British Pentecostalism, and the First World War (1914-1918)", in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 32 (2008), pp. 281-302; Neil ALLISON, "Free Church Revivalism in the British Army during the First World War", in M. SNAPE and E. MADIGAN (eds), *The Clergy in Khaki...*, pp. 41-56, and M. SNAPE (ed.), *The Back Parts of War...*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>71</sup> M. SNAPE, "The Great War", in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. IX, *World Christianities (c. 1914-c. 2000)*, ed. Hugh MCLEOD, Cambridge, 2006; Michael BURLEIGH, *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Great War*, London, 2005, pp. 425-60; A. GREGORY, "Beliefs and Religion"..., and P. JENKINS, *The Great and Holy War...*

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Anglophone societies such as Canada, Australia and (as in Richard Schweitzer's case) the United States<sup>72</sup>. There is, furthermore, a growing body of scholarship that can facilitate such comparisons<sup>73</sup>. While there were practically no Lutherans, relatively few Roman Catholics, and precious few secularists in British society in 1914, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists were members of religious families that embraced the whole Anglophone world-with far-reaching implications, especially in terms of American public opinion.

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If the religious history of Britain in the Great War has been hampered by didacticism, denominationalism, and sheer parochialism, it has also been hostage to a self-regarding national mythology that treats the Great War as a uniquely terrible and self-contained event in British history. Significantly, a recent study of religion on the British home front fell into the trap of describing the Great War as “the most dreadful war in human history”<sup>74</sup>, a wholly unwarrantable claim in view of the global experience of the Second World War. Hence, it behoves revisionist historians to take a broader view of British religion and the Great War, not only geographically but also chronologically. For instance, and although the short-term responses of British theologians to the First World War have been studied in the light of theology and nationalism<sup>75</sup>, British Christianity's most significant and lasting contribution to twentieth-century Christian theology was made posthumously by G.A. Studdert Kennedy (“Woodbine Willie”) in the form of his theology of divine passibility, a theology that was developed on the Western Front and which gained in traction after the unsurpassed horrors of

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<sup>72</sup> R. SCHWEITZER, *The Cross and the Trenches*...

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Michael MCKERNAN, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches (1914-1918)*, Sydney/Canberra, 1980 (Studies in the Christian movement, 6); Duff CRERAR, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War*, Montreal-Kingston-London-Buffalo, 1995; Gordon L. HEATH (ed.), *Canadian Churches and the First World War*, Cambridge, 2014; John F. PIPER, *The American Churches in World War I*, Athens (Ohio), 1985, and Jonathan H. EBEL, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War*, Princeton (N.J.)-Oxford, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> M. AUSTIN, “Like a Swift Hurricane”..., pp. 244-45.

<sup>75</sup> S. MEWS, “Neo-Orthodoxy, Liberalism and War: Karl Barth, P.T. Forsyth and John OMAN, 1914-18”, in *Studies in Church History*, vol. 14 (1977) [Derek BAKER (ed.), “Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History”], pp. 361-75; Charles E. BAILEY, “The British Protestant Theologians in the First World War: Germanophobia Unleashed”, in *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 77 (1984), pp. 195-221, and Mark D. CHAPMAN, “Anglo-German Theological Relations during the First World War”, in *Journal for the History of Modern Theology*, vol. 7 (2000), pp. 109-26.

the Second World War<sup>76</sup>. Similarly, the two most influential English-language Christian allegories of the twentieth century — C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56), and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) — also emerged from the Great War as the work of decades, heavily influenced by their authors’ experiences as infantry officers on the Western Front.

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While there was much that was slow-burning in terms of religious responses to the First World War, before we conclude it should be stressed that the world war of 1914-1918 was in no sense Britain’s *first* “Great War” — or indeed its last. Prior to 1914, this term was used in relation to Britain’s twenty-five year struggle against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France<sup>77</sup>. Moreover, as a world power from the early eighteenth century, Britain waged a series of costly and transformative global wars from 1755 through to 1945. Hence, the religious history of these conflicts, badly neglected at present, must surely shed some light upon the religious dimensions and dynamics of the Great War as we understand it. For example, in the Napoleonic era, and like the Kaiser a century later, Napoleon was identified in popular prophecy as the beast of Revelation, and British soldiers at Waterloo interpreted the survival of the crucifix in the chapel of the chateau of Hougoumont<sup>78</sup> in much the same way as their descendants understood the seemingly miraculous survival of calvaries on the Great War battlefields of Belgium and northern France. “No angels were seen over Dunkirk”, so Albert Marrin wrote, with reference to the Angels of Mons, in 1974, “the kind of talk and symbolism that went down so easily in 1914 had lost its emotive power by 1939<sup>79</sup>.” Forty years later, and with the same misplaced assurance, Philip Jenkins averred that:

“In Europe, even at moments of greatest exaltation, the second war produced no overtly religious manifestations vaguely comparable with those of the first. [...] It is very difficult to find propaganda imagery depicting supernatural intervention on the battlefield of the kind that was so commonplace a generation earlier: angels steered clear of this conflict<sup>80</sup>.”

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<sup>76</sup> S. BELL, “The Theology of ‘Woodbine Willie’ in Context”, in M. SNAPE and E. MADIGAN (eds), *The Clergy in Khaki...*, pp. 95-110.

<sup>77</sup> Charles OMAN, *Wellington’s Army (1809-1814)*, reed., London, 2006 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. London, 1912], p. 320.

<sup>78</sup> M. SNAPE, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War*, Abingdon-New York, 2005, p. 212.

<sup>79</sup> A. MARRIN, *The Last Crusade...*, p. 253.

<sup>80</sup> P. JENKINS, *The Great and Holy War...*p. 368.

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However, during the Second World War, the evacuation from Dunkirk *was* hailed as a miracle in Great Britain, as was the survival of St. Paul's Cathedral amidst the devastation of the London blitz<sup>81</sup>. British soldiers sported the insignia of the cross to a far greater extent than they had in the Great War, and Britain's most celebrated general — Bernard Law Montgomery — the son of an Anglican bishop and the brother of an army chaplain, publicly invoked the Almighty with a style and regularity that was alien to his forbears of the First World War<sup>82</sup>.

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In conclusion, and a century after its outbreak, historians of religion are at last uncovering the true complexities and potential in studying the British churches in the era of the Great War. Influenced, perhaps inevitably, by the religious turbulence, nuclear anxieties, and anti-war sentiments of the “long” 1960s, historians of the 1970s created a potent and compelling narrative of ecclesiastical miscalculation, misconduct and decline, a narrative of the Great War that not only spoke to the concerns of their own time but which conformed to the linear, long-term model of secularisation in Britain which then prevailed among historians and sociologists of religion. However, since the late 1990s, and with the Cold War at an end, historians have taken a more dispassionate view of the evidence, both statistical and otherwise, evidence that shows no great crisis of faith and no great falling away from the churches as a result of Britain's experience of the Great War. Instead, a more complex picture has emerged, one that fits with a new chronology of secularisation that identifies the “long” 1960s as *the* pivotal period of religious change in twentieth-century British society. It has now been shown that, within the churches, contemporary attitudes towards the Great War were generally more nuanced and their responses more varied than the previous, dominant narrative had conceded. Furthermore, the experience of war was not necessarily a solvent of faith, and nor was the churches' response to the conflict as ineffectual or as denominationally channelled as had been supposed. In fact, and as a growing number of regional and transnational studies have shown, the position of the British churches was fairly robust throughout the war, and into the inter-war era. Significantly, the extent of the churches' decline as a result of their performance in 1914-18, or rather the lack of it, was to be made apparent two decades later, in the midst of another and still greater global war.

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<sup>81</sup> M. F. SNAPE and S. G. PARKER, “Keeping Faith and Coping...”, pp. 402 and 414.

<sup>82</sup> M. SNAPE, *God and the British Soldier...*, pp. 72-76 and 184.

MICHAEL SNAPE

Michael SNAPE,  
université de Durham.